

Christian Doctrine Made Simple

Preface



You are standing on the Nevada shore of Lake Tahoe early in the morning. The sun is just beginning to rise over the mountains, turning the water into a sheet of glass. Tahoe stretches out before you—**22 miles across, over 1,600 feet deep**, cold, clear, and impossibly blue. You need to get to the California side, but instead of driving around the lake, you decide to water-ski across it. You strap on your skis, grip the tow rope, and nod to the speed boat driver. The boat roars to life, the line snaps tight, and **suddenly** you are up on the water, skimming across the surface at thirty miles an hour.

The wind tears at your face. Spray explodes around your legs. The cold water slaps your shins like handfuls of ice. The boat hits a wake and you bounce hard, fighting to keep your balance.

Your arms burn. . . . Your legs shake. . . . The shoreline on the far side seems to crawl toward you, inch by inch, as the miles pass beneath your skis. By the time you finally reach California, you are **exhilarated, breathless, and exhausted**. You step out of your skis, collapse onto the dock, and try to catch your breath while replaying what you just accomplished.

A bystander walks over and asks, “So... did you have a really great **experience** on Lake Tahoe?”

You grin and answer, “Yes, I sure did!”

And in one sense, you did. You crossed it. You felt it. You tasted the spray and fought the waves. But in reality, you only touched the top six inches of a lake that is so deep that it could swallow the **Empire State Building** and still have room to spare.

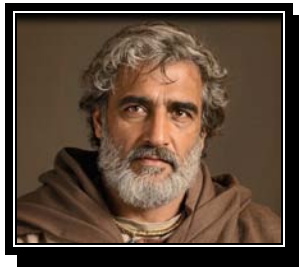
That is exactly what this book does.

Christian Doctrine Made Simple will take you across the great lake of Christian theology—God, Scripture, humanity, sin, Christ, salvation, the Spirit, the church, and the last things. Each doctrine is deep, wide, and rich enough to occupy a lifetime of study. Graduate students spend years diving into these waters, and scholars devote entire careers to exploring a single doctrinal shoreline. But this book is not designed to plunge you into the depths. It is designed to pull you across the surface—clear, fast, and **exhilarating**—giving you a true experience of the landscape

without requiring you to master its full depth. You will feel the spray, see the contours of the lake, and gain a real sense of its shape and beauty, even though we are only skimming the top few inches. But for now, enjoy the ride across the surface. If at any point you want to stop, sink down, and explore the depths of a particular doctrine, the recommended readings at the end of each chapter, and in the appendix, will guide you. But for now, put on your skis, grip the rope, and enjoy the ride across the top of the lake.

Meet Eusebius, your Speedboat Driver

As you sit on the dock catching your breath, the driver of the boat steps out and offers you a hand. He is dressed in simple fourth-century robes, his face weathered by study and years of service, his eyes bright with the kind of clarity that comes from a life spent near Scripture. He smiles warmly.



You blink, still trying to process the fact that your boat driver looks like he stepped out of the early church. Then he speaks:

Click [HERE](#) to Watch your Speed Boat Driver

Meet Eusebius, your Speedboat Driver

My friend, you have crossed the lake. But you have only tasted its surface.

The depths of this lake run far below what you have just experienced. And so it is with the doctrines of our faith. They are deep, rich, and vast. But today, I will take you across the surface so you may see their shape, their beauty, and their unity.

I am Eusebius of Caesarea—pastor, historian, and eyewitness to the Council of Nicaea in the year you reckon as A.D. 325. For many years I have served the church as a guardian of Christian doctrine, preserving the faith handed down from the apostles and recording the works of God in history.

In this book, I will be your guide. I will not plunge you into the depths all at once. Instead, like a skilled pilot pulling a skier across Lake Tahoe, I will take you across the great lake of Christian theology. You will feel its breadth, its beauty, and its unity as we move swiftly across its surface. And when the time is right, I will invite you to explore its depths more fully. But for now, take hold of the rope, steady your footing, and let us begin the journey together.

A Book On Systematic Theology?

One day, while working on this book, my wife asked me what I was working on. I turned to her and said, “I’m writing a book on systematic theology.” She looked at me in shock and said, “*I thought you hated systematic theology!*”

And she was right!

I’ve never enjoyed the big, heavy theology textbooks. They’re long, they’re technical, and they often feel like they were written for scholars in a library rather than ordinary Christians trying to follow Jesus. But even though I’ve never loved the *format*, I’ve always believed that the *ideas* behind systematic theology matter. Every Christian needs to understand the basic doctrines of the faith — just not in a 1,200-page academic volume.

So I told her, “I’m writing a book for people like me — people who ***hate systematic theology***, but still need to know a little about it.”

That’s exactly what this book is.

This is a book on systematic theology for people who *hate* systematic theology.

Most Christians have never enjoyed thick theology textbooks. They’re long, they’re technical, and they often feel like they were written for scholars in a library, not ordinary believers sitting in a church pew. But behind those big books is a simple idea: Christians have always tried to understand what the Bible teaches — clearly, carefully, and in an organized way.

Over the centuries, the church has developed four basic steps to do that. Let’s put those steps in simple, everyday language.

1. Start with the verse itself — “What did the author mean?”

The first step is simply slowing down and looking closely at a single verse or passage. You read it the way you’d read a personal letter from a friend — paying attention to the words, the tone, and the situation. You ask basic questions like: *What was the writer actually saying? Who was he talking to? What would the first readers have understood when they heard this?*

Take John 3:16 as an example. Before we jump into sermons, commentaries, or theological debates, we start by asking, “What did Jesus mean when He said this to Nicodemus? Why did He say it at night? What was Nicodemus struggling to understand?” Exegesis is simply the careful, respectful work of letting the verse speak for itself before we add anything else to it.

This careful, verse-by-verse study is called **exegesis** — a fancy word that simply means “drawing out the author’s original meaning.”

2. Look at everything that author wrote — “How does this fit into the whole book?”

Once you’ve looked closely at a single verse, the next step is to zoom out and see how that verse fits into the bigger story of the book it’s in. With John 3:16, you’d ask, “How does this verse fit into the whole conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus in John 3? What themes has John already introduced in chapters 1 and 2? How does John talk about ‘life,’ ‘light,’ ‘believing,’ and ‘the world’ in the rest of his Gospel?”

Then you widen the lens even more and look at everything else this same author wrote — the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John, and even Revelation. You start to notice patterns: John talks about God’s love, eternal life, and believing in Jesus the same way across all his writings. Finally, you look at how this theme shows up in the rest of Scripture — how Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (which Jesus mentions in John 3), how the prophets spoke of God’s saving love, and how Paul explains salvation by grace through faith.

This step is called **Biblical Theology** — tracing how a truth develops across the different books of the Bible.

3. Listen to the early church — “How did Christians before us understand this?”

After you’ve looked at the verse itself and then zoomed out to see how it fits into the whole Bible, the next step is to listen to how Christians in the centuries after the New Testament understood that same passage. This is where we ask simple questions like: *What did the early pastors and teachers say about this? How did the church wrestle with difficult questions? What did the great councils decide when believers disagreed?*

With John 3:16, for example, you might look at how early writers like **Irenaeus** or **Clement of Alexandria** explained God’s love for the world, or how **Augustine** talked about believing in Christ and receiving eternal life. You’d also notice how the early church used verses like this when defending the full deity of Jesus at the **Council of Nicaea** in A.D. 325. Historical Theology is simply paying attention to how Christians before us understood the same Scriptures we read today — not because they were perfect, but because they were faithful brothers and sisters trying to understand God’s Word just like we are.

This is called **Historical Theology** — learning how the Christians who came before us wrestled with doctrines and reached their conclusions.

4. Pull it all together — “What do we believe as a whole?”

Finally, after looking closely at the verse, tracing its theme through the whole Bible, and listening to how Christians throughout history understood it, you gather everything together and organize it into clear statements of belief. This is where you ask, “*So what does the whole Bible teach about this subject?*”

With John 3:16, you take the meaning of the verse itself, the themes John develops in his Gospel and letters, and the insights of the early church, and you summarize what Scripture teaches about God’s love, the person of Christ, faith, salvation, and eternal life.

Systematic Theology is simply the step where all the pieces come together — the Bible, the authors, the early church, and the whole story of Scripture — and are arranged in a way that helps us see the big picture. It’s how we end up with clear, organized doctrines about who God is, what salvation means, and how the Christian life fits together.

This is called **Systematic Theology** — putting the teachings of the Bible into an orderly, easy-to-understand structure.

Classic examples include:

- The **Westminster Confession of Faith** (written in 1647 by the protestant reformers)
- Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (1,291 pages, 1994, one of the most popular systematic theology books currently used in colleges and graduate schools)

These are excellent resources — but they are also huge, detailed, and often overwhelming for the average Christian.

So what is this book trying to do?

This book takes the results of all that deep academic work and brings it **up to the surface**, where ordinary believers can see it, understand it, and enjoy it.

Think of it this way:

We’re water skiing across the lake, not scuba diving to the bottom.

We’re covering the major doctrines of the Christian faith in clear, simple language — the kind of language you’d hear in a Sunday school class or a small group Bible study.

No jargon. No academic footnotes. No 1,200-page textbooks.

Just the core truths of the Christian faith, explained in a way that makes sense to anyone who loves Jesus and wants to understand their Bible better.

Want to go deeper?

At the end of each chapter — and again in the appendix — you'll find suggestions for further reading:

- simple books for beginners
- intermediate books for growing Christians
- advanced books for those who want to study more seriously
- and the actual writings of the early church fathers for the really serious student

You can go as deep as you want, at your own pace.

Why is Eusebius Our Guide

As we walk through these doctrines together, I've chosen **Eusebius of Caesarea** to serve as our guide — not because he was perfect, but because he stands at a unique crossroads in Christian history. He lived close enough to the time of the apostles to preserve their story, yet far enough into the life of the church to witness how believers wrestled with Scripture, defended the faith, and clarified essential doctrines. He knew the Scriptures deeply, he knew the early church personally, and he watched the great questions of theology take shape in real time. In many ways, Eusebius is the bridge between the world of the New Testament and the world we live in today. That makes him the best companion for a **Made Simple** journey like this — someone who can help us see the big picture without overwhelming us, guiding us gently across the lake rather than dragging us into the deep waters of academic theology.

A brief note about tools: Parts of this book were drafted with the assistance of artificial intelligence — which means I occasionally had to referee arguments among my own guide characters about who deserved credit. Shlomo, my Hebrew guide, insisted the best lines were obviously his. Average Joe Liberty claimed he asked all the important questions. Patriot Henry declared the whole project a triumph of freedom. Marcus of Antioch quietly reminded everyone that he was quoting sources before it was cool. Eusebius reminded them all that the Council of Nicea in 325 AD was not all that orderly either . . . all the time!

Meanwhile, the AI just sat there politely, waiting for me to finish laughing.

So let the record show: **I** am the author. The ideas, explanations, illustrations, and doctrinal positions are mine. AI simply helped me write faster — it didn't think for me. Any mistakes that remain belong to me, not to Shlomo, Joe, Henry, Marcus, Eusebius, or the machine.